

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABUJA 000644

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [GV](#) [XY](#) [ECOWAS](#)
SUBJECT: ECOWAS CONCERNED ABOUT GUINEA

Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

¶1. (C) Dr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas, the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS, voiced concerns about the state of Guinean President Conte's health and the political stability of Guinea during a meeting with the Ambassador on March 21. Chambas said that he wants to maintain close contact with the Embassy and the USG on Guinea-related issues, and hopes to share information on a regular basis.

The ECOWAS Assessment

¶2. (C) ECOWAS has been aware of Conte's move to Geneva since the weekend, and Chambas was especially disturbed by reports he has received that the Guinean Ambassador to Switzerland was denied access to his President, fueling concerns about the true state of Conte's health. Chambas has consulted with the member states to discuss options should Conte not return to Guinea. Chambas said the heads of state have all agreed that nobody will accept the intervention of military into Guinean politics. In the event that the President of the National Assembly does assume power, Chambas will immediately travel to Conakry, with several ECOWAS foreign ministers, as a public show of support for the new leader and to begin planning for elections. (Note: Chambas said that President Obasanjo has made a plane available for ECOWAS to travel to Guinea, if it is needed. End note.) The ECOWAS Heads of State will then plan an extraordinary summit prior to any election to again lend public support to the constitutional process. Chambas noted that, with the Togo experience in mind, he has counseled Sompore not to travel outside of the Guinea in the near future.

¶3. (C) ECOWAS sees four possible scenarios in Guinea if Conte dies. The first, and most desirable, is for Sompore to assume power and lead Guinea to a national election, preferably without running for the Presidency himself. Chambas said the recent local elections in Guinea have left voter registrations up to date, removing one possible obstacle to national elections. Chambas is concerned, however, that Sompore is not close enough to the power structures in Guinea to be either accepted as a leader or to be effective. The second scenario Chambas laid out was the intervention of senior military leaders, attempting to maintain their own status quo. The third scenario would be the intervention of junior officers, either directly or in reaction to a senior leader coup. Chambas said the Guinean opposition has told him in the past that they prefer this scenario, "letting those young boys sort things out." The final scenario Chambas discussed was his "nightmare" -- the political center fails to hold and Guinea disintegrates into violence.

Comment

¶4. (C) Chambas has long been deeply concerned over a possible succession crisis in Guinea. In the past, he has viewed Togo as a test case for Guinea. With respect to Guinea, ECOWAS will seek to quickly move ahead with constitutionally-mandated elections, accepting the results even if flawed, and then work on reforms in advance of the next constitutionally-mandated election.

CAMPBELL